

Excerpts of the Annual Monitoring Officer's Report

The Monitoring Officer prepares an annual report which summarises the key parts of the Monitoring Officer's work from the previous financial year. The Monitoring Officer Report covered the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. The current Monitoring Officer has held the role since February 2021.

Excerpts of relevance to the Standards Committee are outlined below.

Additional information is provided to the Standards Committee relating to complaints received during this period and referred to in the excerpt marked (e) below. This is at Appendix A.

Excerpts:

<p>(c) Establish and maintain the Register of Member's interests and gifts and hospitality.</p>	<p>Members are required to provide a register of interests and keep such up to date.</p> <p>During the year 2020/2021, the country experienced restrictions in work, socialising and social events due to the pandemic. Whilst there have been entries on this register in previous years, there are none for the year 2020/2021.</p> <p>The Register of Members' Interests is publicised on the Council's website. The Registers are available for inspection at the Council's offices.</p>
---	--

(e) Investigate misconduct in respect of District, Parish and Town Councillors under the Code of Conduct.

During the year between April 2020 and March 2021, a total of 20 complaints were received (14 relate to parish/town council and 6 relate to the District Council). This compares to 29 complaints from the previous year and relates to District, parish and town councils.

The most common source of complaints were alleged bullying and disrespect to others. The majority of complaints were assessed as requiring no further action. Sometimes this has been accompanied by some informal recommendations or guidance to improve governance. Three parish council matters were referred for investigation during the year 2020/2021.

A Code of Conduct complaint was made regarding information missing from a Member's register. Whilst it was found that there had been a breach of the Code, there was no evidence of any deliberate attempt to gain an advantage in the failure to update the register, resulting in no further action and advice. This complaint prompted a review of the Members' Register of Interests and led to contact with some further 7 Members who appeared not to have updated their register of interests. Following this communication, Members updated their registers. Again, these omissions were considered an oversight rather than an attempt to gain advantage. The Localism Act 2011 does place significant importance on registering interests, especially disclosable pecuniary interest and Members have been reminded of this. Where appropriate, Members have been reminded of the importance of respecting the provisions of the Code and other Protocols.

Advice has been offered to parishes, particularly via contact through their clerks with the Monitoring Officer and her staff. More recently, a Clerks cluster café, hosted by NALC, has provided the council with an opportunity for contact with town and parish councils, as has the NNDC Town and Parish Council forum.

	<p>Members have regularly sought advice in order to comply with the Code of Conduct, including in relation to declaring interests under the Code.</p> <p>Members have been provided with guidance through the provision of briefing notes through the Member's Bulletin.</p> <p>*(A new Code of Conduct has subsequently been adopted by the Council and Members are to receive training during the year 2021/22.)</p>
(g) Provide advice to Town and Parish Councils on the interpretation of the Code of Conduct.	<p>The Monitoring Officer, and her staff, have provided advice to Parish Councils on the Standards and Conduct Arrangements during 2020/21 via telephone and email.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer (and her staff) have provided advice and assistance to a number of parishes through interventions to raise standards and deal with complaints. Further advice/assistance has recently been provided to parishes/towns to help them comply with their obligations under the Code through the cluster café and the Town and Parish Council Forum.</p>
(h) Promote and support high standards of conduct through support to the Standards Committee.	<p>The Committee has considered and supported adoption of the new Code of Conduct (the Local Government Association new Model Code of Conduct).</p> <p>The Independent Person arrangements are working well.</p>

A new Member Code of Conduct has been adopted by the authority, based on the Local Government Association Model Code. Training is to be provided. Members will be reminded to keep their register of interests up to date.

